

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6221

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 27054

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJ: CALL FOR DEBATE ON MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE

REF: BANGKOK 26894

SUMMARY: OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE REPORTEDLY OBTAINED ENOUGH SUPPORT TO CALL A SPECIAL SESSION OF PARLIAMENT FOR DEBATE ON A MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE. FOUR MEMBERS OF SOCIAL AGRAIRIAN PARTY HAVE APPARENTLY DEFECTED TO THE GOVERNMENT COALITION. SOME CRACKS HAVE APPEARED IN THE COALITION, BUT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT APPEARS ABLE TO WEATHER NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE.
END SUMMARY.

1. BANGKOK PRESS REPORTED DEC 31 THAT THE 72 SEAT DEMOCRAT PARTY HAD VOTED UNANIMOUSLY TO ASK THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE TO CALL A SPECIAL SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IN ORDER TO DEBATE A MOTION OF NO-CONFIDENCE IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT. THE NEW FORCE PARTY (11 SEATS) AND THE SOCIALIST UNITED FRONT PARTY (10 SEATS) HAVE ALSO DECIDED TO SUPPORT THE CALL, FOR A MINIMUM OF 93 VOTES. 123 VOTES, FROM THE LOWER HOUSE OR FROM BOTH HOUSES, ARE REQUIRED TO CALL A SPECIAL SESSION, (THE SENATE, HOWEVER, CANNOT VOTE ON THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION ITSELF). THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE ITS 12 VOTES AS WELL, AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES
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ARE BUSY DRUMMING UP THE REST OF THE VOTES NEEDED.

2. THE OPPOSITION SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY (19 SEATS) IS AT THIS POINT A QUESTION MARK. THE PARTY ABSTAINED EN MASSE FROM VOTING ON THE BUDGET BILL OCT 10, IN EFFECT SUPPORTING THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT, AND THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT RUMORS SINCE THEN THAT THE PARTY WOULD JOIN THE COALITION IN A CABINET RESHUFFLE. IT APPEARS THAT AT LEAST FOUR PARTY MEMBERS DEFECTED TO THE GOVERNMENT COALITION ON DEC 30. SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY LEADER SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN DENIED THAT ANY MEMBERS OF HIS PARTY HAD JOINED THE GOVERNMENT, BUT THE BANGKOK POST REPORTED THAT WHEN SAWET CALLED AN URGENT MEETING OF HIS PARTY ON DEC 30 TO DISCUSS THE MATTER, NO ONE SHOWED UP. MEANWHILE, THE DEMOCRATS ARE CLAIMING THAT THE SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY WILL SUPPORT THEM ON THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION.

3. THE DEFECTION OF AT LEAST PART OF THE OPPOSITION TO KHUKRIT, IF TRUE, GIVES THE COALITION AN EXTRA CUSHION OF VOTES. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SIGNS INDICATING THAT ALL IS NOT WELL IN OTHER WAYS. HOUSE SPEAKER PRASIT KANCHANAWAT, LEADER OF THE 16 SEAT GOVERNMENT SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTY, IS RUMORED TO BE SUPPORTING THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION. IF TRUE, THIS WOULD BE A MAJOR BLOW TO KHUKRIT. THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY (GOVERNMENT, 45 VOTES) IS REPORTED TO BE THREATENING TO WITHDRAW FROM THE COALITION. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL THAT IT IS USING THE PROSPECT OF A NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION TO GAIN CONCESSIONS FOR THE PARTY WITHIN THE COALITION, AND DOES NOT SERIOUSLY INTEND TO WITHDRAW, BUT THE THREAT WILL BE TROUBLESOME FOR KHUKRIT. KHUKRIT'S OWN SOCIAL ACTION PARTY IS ALSO HAVING DIFFICULTIES. ON DEC 30, THE CIVIL COURT DECLARED MINISTER OF JUSTICE YAI SAWITCHAT BANKRUPT, AND FROZE HIS ASSETS. YAI HAS FILED AN APPEAL, BUT HE MAY BE FORCED TO RESIGN OVER THE ISSUE. KHUKRIT MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE THE VACANCY TO ATTRACT OPPOSITION SUPPORT FOR HIS COALITION, BUT THE LOSS OF PARTY STALWART YAI WOULD HURT HIM.

4. ONE PROBABLE MOTIVE OF THE OPPOSITION IN CALLING FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION IS TO SHOW THAT IT IS STILL ALIVE AND KICKING. SO FAR IT HAS HARDLY BEEN WORTHY OF THE NAME,
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AND HAS GENERALLY BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT. A DEBATE ON A NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION WILL PUT KHUKRIT ON NOTICE THAT THE OPPOSITION CANNOT BE IGNORED.

5. FEW OBSERVERS FEEL THAT THE NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION CAN PASS, OR THAT THE OPPOSITION WANTS IT TO PASS. SHOULD KHUKRIT LOSE A VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE, HE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS, AND FEW MP'S OF ANY

PERSUASION ARE ANXIOUS FOR THAT AT THE MOMENT. MANY WHO
SUPPORT THE CALLING OF THE SPECIAL SESSION WOULD PROBABLY
NOT SUPPORT THE MOTION ON THE FINAL VOTE. IF THE VOTE
WERE HELD TODAY, KHUKRIT COULD PROBABLY COUNT ON A COM-
FORTABLE MAJORITY, DESPITE HIS PROBLEMS. BUT HE WILL BE
REQUIRED TO USE SOME FANCY FOOTWORK OVER THE NEXT FEW
WEEKS TO STRENGTHEN THE COALITION AND SHORE UP HIS DEFENSES.
MASTERS

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